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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/PD (ANYASO, TITUS, LISEBY), AF/W (ACOOK)
DEPARTMENT FOR IIP/IR
PARIS FOR ARS (DWINTON)

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KIRC](#) [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [BN](#)
SUBJECT: BENIN: IRO VISIT TO POST

¶1. SUMMARY: Regional Information Resource Officer (IRO) Myra Brown visited the IRC in Cotonou on March 15 - 20, 2009 during her first visit to Benin. The IRC Director Akodigna and the IRO took advantage of the visit to conduct a three-day methodology workshop at the University of Abomey-Calavi. During her visit to Benin, IRO Myra Brown visited two American Corners and attended the signing ceremony of the MOU renewal with American Corner of Grand Popo. She also held interviews with media outlets in Benin. END SUMMARY.

¶2. DATE OF ACTIVITY: March 16-20; Second quarter, FY 09

¶3. PROGRAM JUSTIFICATION/OBJECTIVES: As part of her regular cycle of Post visits, the IRO came to Benin to review the IRC operation in Cotonou, meet with the DCM, PAO and staff, and conduct a methodology seminar at the University of Abomey-Calavi as requested by Post at the suggestion of the English Department at the University of Abomey-Calavi. As a result of this seminar, students received training that will enable them to state the topic of their dissertation and can check for information using several Internet resources.

¶4. MPP UMBRELLA THEMES AND AUDIENCE REACHED: Promotion of Education and Mutual Understanding. The seminar attracted more than one hundred students. They also watched the film "Ironed Jawed Angels" which depicted the courage, determination and team work of suffragists who fought for and obtained the passage of the 19th Amendment. The event was extensively covered by the media. A prominent TV station, Golfe TV, gave interviews to IRO Brown and some workshop participants.

¶5. ACTIVITIES/IMPACT/RESULT: The workshop was initiated by IRC Cotonou and the English Department of the University of Abomey-Calavi as part of IRC Cotonou efforts regarding information literacy. The seminar was attended by more than 100 students and covered topics such as how to state a topic for a dissertation and how to use both traditional and online resources for information retrieval purposes. This workshop was also an opportunity for students to learn about copyright issues, plagiarism and procrastination. They were introduced to reference styles like APA and MLA.

¶6. The first day of the seminar was devoted to how to state a dissertation topic with advice regarding reading, working hard, getting focused on assignments and how to be organized. Students learned how to narrow a topic in order to focus on the most salient points they need to cover according to their time frame, work load and resources available.

¶7. On the second day, the IRO's presentation focused on copyright issues and plagiarism. The Director of the "Campus Numerique Francophone de Cotonou" allowed students to use his lab for presentations and practice sessions. The room was too small for the number of participants who came to learn, but the determination of students to learn as much as possible was clearly evident as some of them were obliged to follow the presentations while seated on the floor or standing at the far back of the room.

¶18. On the third day of the practice sessions, the IRCD and IRO introduced students to web directories such as the Internet Public Library as well as search engines and databases. They were also introduced to "Technorati," a website that lists most popular blogs and "Zamzar," a site where they can download and convert video files. IRO Brown's presentations took students through The Washington Post, the Library of Congress website, Wikipedia and other resources.

¶19. As a way to conclude the seminar with an educational theme that brought focus on Women's History Month, the IRCD presented the DVD, "Iron Jawed Angels," a film depicting the struggle of women who went to jail in their efforts to secure passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution which guarantees women the right to vote. At the conclusion of the film, students commented on how much they appreciated this initiative from the Public Affairs Section and the lesson learned: how to be courageous and work with determination to face challenges. One student commented that women and men are partners for life. She said, "Women are our mothers, sisters and spouses and for all these reasons it is not good to mistreat them or to abuse them." Some other students pointed out the importance of education in women's emancipation.

¶10. Participants expressed their appreciation for the American Cultural Center's initiative in organizing the seminar and the film show. Students were so appreciative that they requested another talk for IRO Brown next visit. IRC staff also requested that the next visit be devoted to a training related to social media and web 2.0.

¶11. On the fourth day of the IRO's visit, the PAO, IRO, and IRCD
COTONOU 00000106 002 OF 002

paid a visit on the Deputy Director of the National Library, Anne Marie Honnougan, to discuss the logistics of transferring the American Corner of Porto-Novo to this location. The delegation visited the space where the American Corner is going to be located and inspected the facilities to be used for program activities.

¶12. NON-USG SOURCES OF IN-COUNTRY FUNDING/IN KIND SUPPORT: In cooperation with the English Department, the "Campus Numerique Francophone de Cotonou" allowed students to use their lab of 40 workstations with Internet access.

¶13. QUALITY OF USG SUPPORT: Excellent. Kudos to IRO Myra Brown who agreed to come and share her knowledge to empower young students. The use of information technology, mixing visual materials with text presentations, made the seminar more vivid and interactive.

BROWN